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A Weekly Publication

OF

SERMONS

PREACHED BY

HENRY WARD BEECHER.

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HENRY WARD BEECHER.

PLYMOUTH PULPIT.

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IV. Treasure that Cannot be Stolen
V. Bearing, but not Overborne.
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THE IDEAL

OF

CHRISTIAN EXPERIENCE.

"Judas saith unto him, not Iscariot, Lord, how is it that thou wilt manifest thyself unto us, and not unto the world? Jesus answered and said unto him, If a man love me, he will keep my words; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him."—JNO. XIV. 22, 23.

No susceptible nature ever reads these marvelous chapters containing Christ's love-talk, in the seclusion of home, and in the last hours that he was spending peacefully with his disciples, without feeling that they are full of meanings which ordinary life furnishes no clue for. Barren or shallow natures are apt to feel that they are extravagant; that they are a kind of spiritual sentimentalism. Venerating natures, that yet do not reach up to the level of these discourses, are wont to think that they are mystical and marvelous. But great hearts have always felt that they were the unfolding of a life of which they had had glimpses, and toward which they were striving, but which had no perfect realization in their experience, and probably none in the experience of any except the Master himself.

In the fourteenth, fifteenth, sixteenth, and perhaps seventeenth chapters of John, there is a more perfect dwelling upon the ideal Christian character and life than in any equal compass in the New Testament. And according to the teaching of our Master, here and elsewhere, the perfect Christian life has the following great constituent elements.

1. It is a life of vital unity with God. It may or may not be consciously in unity with him; but the teaching is, that, as the body derives its stimulation, its food and force, from its contact with the material globe, and from its obedience to physical laws, so that which Christianity includes derives its vitality from its connection with the invisible God. Its force and its food are from no lower source.

In our text Christ promises, not obscurely, to his disciples, that if

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they love him, and if they will but open the door through which alone God can enter into the human soul, the great golden gate of love, he will come in, and the Father with him, and that there shall be a love-life begun.

2. It is declared, as an element of the typical Christian experience, that it shall be a life of perfect peace.

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you; not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid."

And again, elsewhere, we find the apostles interpreting this:

"The peace of God, which passeth all understanding [or analysis], shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus."

Here is what the apostles spoke out of their own experience—an experimental interpretation of this promise of the Master. The "fruit of the Spirit" is said to be "love, peace, joy in the Holy Ghost."

Here, then, are two great elements—first, a unity with God through love; and second, the effect, which is a dominating peace.

3. This state is declared to be one which delivers the soul from the power and the domination of sin. When the soul has risen into this state of communion with God, and has entered upon this deep spiritual tranquility, it is declared to be sinless—a matter which has perplexed, and annoyed beyond measure, interpreters and experimental Christians. Such language as this, in the fifth chapter of the first epistle of John, has been very much a matter of debate:

"For whatsoever is born of God overcometh the world; and this is the victory that overcometh the world, even our faith." "We know that whosoever is born of God sinneth not; but he that is begotten of God keepeth himself, and that wicked one toucheth him not."

This is another peculiarity of the Christian state, *par excellence*, that it is sinless; that men have ministered to them, not simply "joy in the Holy Ghost," not simply Christ's "peace which passeth all understanding," but the power to "overcome the world."

4. It is taught us, unequivocally, that in the typical Christian state of mind, there are forces developed of which, in our lower natural state, we have no hint, no warning; forces that are not ordinarily developed, and that cannot be developed by any secular and purely wordly education; forces which we are accustomed to call miraculous.

If you will turn to Matthew's Gospel, you will find Christ enunciating this in the most distinct manner, in the seventeenth chapter. The disciples had asked him why they could not cast out these evil spirits.

"And Jesus said unto them, Because of your unbelief."

It was because they were living on a lower plane where the power to do such things was not known.

"For verily I say unto you, if ye have faith as a grain of mustard seed, ye shall say unto this mountain, Remove hence to yonder place, and it shall remove; and nothing shall be impossible to you."

Lest it may be thought that this was a transient and metaphorical teaching, listen again to a declaration in the same book, and the twenty-first chapter, where the fig-tree was cursed, and it withered away, and the disciples, remarking it, were astonished.

"Jesus answered and said unto them, Verily I say unto you, If ye have faith, and doubt not, ye shall not only do this which is done to the fig tree, but also, if ye shall say unto this mountain, Be thou removed, and be thou cast into the sea, it shall be done. And all things whatsoever ye shall ask in prayer, believing, ye shall receive."

Now, that this was not understood by the apostles themselves as being a mere metaphorical or figurative promise, is shown in the directions which are given by them for the healing of sickness, by prayer of faith and by their own power of working miraculous cures, which they held in reliance upon, or in explicit faith of, this declaration of the Master.

Here, then, are the four great elements which constitute Christian experience. It is a life of unity with God, developing the supreme power of love in the soul. It is a life in which there is such an influence exerted upon the mind that all the soul is perfectly harmonized, and yet perfectly alive, so that it rises into a "peace which passeth all understanding." It is a state in which such is the power of this divine influence of joy and peace in love that the man has control over himself and over his circumstances, and sins not. It is a life and experience which goes still further than this. When a man has been lifted up into this state of feeling, he is existing upon a plane in which the relation of his mind to matter itself is changed, and new forces and new possibilities are involved. And that which a man cannot be and cannot do when he is living on the lower plane, he finds, strangely, that he is able to be and to do when he has risen into this higher spiritual condition. He has power over natural law. We have power now over natural law; but it is in a lower way. It is because I have power over natural law that I am a husbandman, and that you are a mechanic. It is the knowledge of natural law, and the knowledge of how to use it, that means skill and ability among men.

The Christian development, the typical Christian experience, it is declared, carries this power over nature still higher. And there are forces in the human soul that are developed at last which give a man a more permanent control over nature than is possible to the common state.

Here, then, Christian experience has the divine presence and a joyful companionship. It lifts up the soul above the agitations of human life and heart-experience; it frees it from the power of all ordinary temptations that assail it; and it develops a simple force which gives law and knowledge and power over the physical world, to an extent

which is not vouchsafed to ordinary conditions of life. Such is the Christianity of the New Testament.

I remark, in view of the forgoing exposition,

First, that this Christianity, or this development of Christian experience, is but the unfolding of the elements which belong to every man's nature. It is the unfolding of latent forces that belong by constitution to the nature of the human mind. Every human soul has this latent power.

It is not, then, a special superaddition in the form of a technical result in Christianity. Christ, who was the sublimest interpreter, the grandest natural philosopher, that ever lived, unfolded to us the knowledge of this hidden life of the soul, and taught the method of disclosure, and that it is the birthright of man to come to this higher range of development, of power and of experience.

It is by spiritual agencies, and not by physical appliances, that it is to be achieved. It is by love, and not by the passions and appetites; it is by the exercise of the supersensuous faculties, and not the physical senses; it is not by science, but by faith, that we are to come into this higher state. But all men have in them the roots of that which may be, by the divine Spirit, developed into this higher fruit of Christian experience.

Now, of this view, which I have not attempted to modify, but which I have made strong on purpose, that it may strike you as something quite transcendental—as something far above the ordinary actual experiences of human life—of this view, you will say, "Does it not rule out the experience of Christendom, generically considered? If that which you have declared to be the true Christian experience, *is* the true Christian experience, are there any Christians? Are there churches full of them? Are there houses full of them? And does it not strike despair to souls that are conscious of their inability to reach any such view, and to make any such attainment as this?"

Those are fair questions, and I will answer them fairly. The answer depends upon whether this Christian character which I have presented to you as the true experience of Christian life is the average experience, and the condition of all hope and all acceptance with God; or whether it is the typical, the ideal character, or pictorial view of that which is possible, and to which the Master is bringing his disciples. It will depend upon whether it is understood that, in practice, this is an experience that is reached gradually, by gradations, or whether it is understood to be something which every man has when he is converted. It depends upon whether it is regarded as a state which men come into at once, or whether it is that teleologic or final condition toward

which every man is aiming, and which he hopes to reach either here or hereafter.

This can be settled, I think, in no way so safely as by watching Christ's own practice in gathering his followers. He certainly taught in such glowing words, and repeated his teaching in such a variety of ways, that no man can avoid comprehending it without doing violence to the spirit and letter of the New Testament.

He taught the reality and the possibility of this high state of soul which I have been delineating to you; and he taught that this was preëminently the Christian state—the ultimate object of aspiration among men. To be in communion with God; to be perfected in love; to be in so high a range of being, in consequence, as to have absolute self-harmony and tranquility and perfect peace; to be by this exaltation lifted above the ordinary annoyances and temptations and sins of humanity; to have the power of thinking things, knowing things, and doing things which do not belong to lower states of experience—this, if anything, was taught in the New Testament, by our Lord Jesus Christ.

But then, we find that he did not make it the test of discipleship that men should be in that state. While he taught it, and while he held it up as a picture, he did not say that no one was a Christian artist who could not paint in himself just such a picture. He, on the other hand, showed that there were gradations allowed, practically, in admitting men to the fellowship and life of the Christian.

For, there were some that would have said to him then, as there are multitudes that would say to him now, "We cannot rise to this conscious personal communion. We earnestly desire to love God, but at best the conception of God is very vague and fugitive, and we cannot love God as we do father and mother." And, out of condescension to that, Christ says,

"He that hath my commandments, and keepeth them, he it is that loveth me."

It is as if he had said, "Can you not yet rise into that emotive and conscious glow of love toward the unseen and invisible Father? Very well, then, take the next step to it. Here are his commandments. Put yourself in the line of the divine love, and keep these commandments, and we will accept that." And so he went down to their infirmity in that direction.

But there were a great many who could not even live a life of obedience, in distinction from a life of emotion. That was too hard for the poor and the miserable. And he says to them, "Well, then, follow me, and learn what you can. Become scholars of mine; and I will teach you, from day to day, what to do. If you are able, love and triumph. Or, if you cannot do that, obey and grow. Or, if you can-

not even comprehend the precepts, then follow me, and I will day by day teach them to you." In other words, "I will accept a desire to learn, a willingness to be taught, and compliance as fast as possible with what you are taught."

But there were some, apparently, even lower than that. One of the most marvelous passages in this regard, in the New Testament, is that which is contained in the tenth chapter of Matthew, where Christ says,

"He that receiveth you receiveth me; and he that receiveth me, receiveth him that sent me." "And whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones, a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple"—

What! if he does not understand anything about decrees, fore-ordination, election or reprobation; if he does not understand anything about the Trinity; if he does not understand anything about the atonement, or the ground and reasons of it; if he does not understand anything about the church, or about holy days and holy practices? Yes; here it stands, without a single mitigation.

"Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, verily, I say unto you, he shall in no wise lose his reward."

We find, then, on the one side, the wonderful disclosure of the possible experience of the soul. And our Master says, "This is that to which you are to come." And we find, on the other side, the same Master saying to men, "If, practically, you cannot do any more in this direction than to have good wishes toward those who are living a Christian life, and you will help them, if it be but to give them a cup of cold water, you shall not lose your reward."

The ideal is exalted, and immense; but the practical administration under that ideal is full of gradations—for I have not given you half, or one in twenty, of the gradations that fall out in the actual administration of this ideal in the Lord Jesus Christ himself, going down almost to zero, and amounting to this: "If there is in mankind one person who is willing to follow me, and learn, and learn how to practice what he learns, that willingness shall be sufficient. He shall be called one of mine. He shall be a disciple." Christ did not demand the full type of Christian experience as a condition of acceptance. He set the ideal before men; and then he accepted, or promised to accept, every one who would sincerely strive after that ideal, no matter at what point he stood, from the highest endowment of genius down to the very child himself. Every man who, looking toward this ideal of purity and peace and divinity in his soul, says, "I will follow after it;" every man who, pointing toward this ideal, says, "I accept this life, and I will try to realize it"—every such man, no matter how slowly he advances, no matter how imperfectly he lives, has the sympathy of Christ. Of all strivers in that direction, he says, "They

shall be mine." He calls them his *scholars*. And those that go to school, or are willing to go to school to Christ, to learn by what steps they may be good; those that are willing to go to this university of experience; those that are seeking for this graduating power of Christianity, however limited may be their attainments, their knowledge, their victories, are pupils. If a man has gone into that school sincerely to learn, and is willing to practice what he learns, he is accepted of God.

Let me now make the applications.

In the first place, to go back to a figure that I have already introduced, Christ opens a school. He marks out the grades. He pictures the highest results that are attainable in a Christian—though they are not given in full disclosure. He also shows that while this is the ideal after which all scholars are to strive, the lowest form, in his view, is as really in the school as the highest form.

When a young person begins a course of liberal education, he says to himself, "I propose to be admitted." He is to become, it may be, an artist; or, it may be, an engineer; or, it may be, a lawyer; or, it may be, a preacher; but he says, "My first step is to learn to read."

Some strong-brained boy, born in the woods out West, and brought up without the slightest learning; some Abraham Lincoln of a boy, lies on his belly by a pine knot, marking from a book, with a rude stick, letters in the sand, and saying, "I *will* learn;" and there goes by a Yale or Cambridge student that has just graduated, and is fuller of knowledge than he ever will be again; and people say to him, "What are you?" "A scholar, sir," he replies. "Oh, yes," they say; "and we have scholars here, too." And they open a door and point to that boy of the blacksmith's forge, who has raked the embers together to study by; or to the boy of the cabin, who is lying by a pine knot, uncouth, awkward, rude in his dress, but with a much-fingered book, studying the profound mystery of addition or subtraction, or trying to spell letters into a word,—and say, "There is a scholar." "You call that a scholar, do you?" "We do. Do not you call him one?"

When I see old *Cœur de Lion* in the picture of a battle, when I see the gigantic form that is shown in athletes among men, how strange it seems to me to be carried into a nursery and have the blanket thrown off from the cradle, and see lying there a little six-months-old boy, that cries for milk, and that only, and cannot help himself—and then to hear such a helpless, diminutive creature called a man! And compared with this giant in the field, it is a pretty poor beginning for a man. But it is the Lord's ordinance that the higher any creature goes in this world, the further he has to run before he makes a jump. Flies, that are very low, are born perfect flies to start with, and

have the full use of themselves from the moment that they are out of the egg. And as you rise in the animal kingdom, the longer the life, the more important the functions, the higher the scale of being, the longer the period of development. And as man is the head of creation, the furthest is he from himself at the start, and the longest has he to wait before he comes to himself.

It is true, therefore, that in that cradle lies a man. But it is all folded up in its case. There are the rudiments which are to be developed into a man. The proudest artist, the noblest orator, the most brilliant warrior, the grandest statesman, was no bigger than that child once, nor different from it. And it is in the power of that child to rise, circumstances favoring. And it is perfectly proper to say that he is in the line of manhood.

Here are the disclosures of Christ as to what is possible in the human soul. He declares what religion is to do for men. What is it to do for them? Is it to give them a few better clothes? Is it to keep them from eating and drinking too much? Is it to improve their morals? Is it to make good bankers and merchants and nice citizens of them? Yes; but these things are only buttons, the trimmings, as it were. They are mere incidental things. The great work of religion is soul-building. That which is meant is the divine power which descends on the soul, unfolding its secret, latent capacities, until it rises into possible commmunion with God, face to face; until it has transcendent harmony and absolute peace which passes understanding; until it is able to tread under foot all ordinary sins; until it is able to speak even as God speaks, as a creator, being a son of God, and the heir of heaven. That which is meant is such an unfolding, such a translation, such a spiritual education, such a scope or sphere or power as this. And that it is which is held up in the New Testament.

But Christ says, "I do not demand that every man who comes into my church shall be all this at once, any more than I demand that a man shall be a man before he has been a babe. Almost as far back as you have a mind to, only say that you put yourself in the line of growth, only say that you take these great blessings, and are traveling, and learning, and going on toward perfection, and I will take you in." This is the spirit of the New Testament, and this is the doctrine of the ideal and the real, and of the relation of the practical in a struggling Christian life to the realization of this blessed ideal.

Here, too, you see what has been the confusion in men's minds. There are many persons who have supposed that they could assume this ultimate condition, this final state, which men come to through the ages sometimes, in rare cases, from individual development and disclosure of being. Fanatical natures have supposed that this could be

assumed as the gift of God immediately upon their conversion, and have gone off into fantastic experiences, into strange nervous developments, which they supposed to belong to this mystic disclosure of Christ in the soul.

It does not invalidate these declarations, that there are so many counterfeits and so many mistakes in respect to them. This is that condition toward which we are to be brought. It is the condition toward which we are walking and striving. But no man comes into it at first and at once. We *grow* into it. We *unfold* into it.

So there is hope for every earnest, sincere soul that wants to be one with God. For any man that is in doubt doctrinally; for any man that from the force of education finds himself unable to accept this or that particular category of doctrine, or this or that mode of stating a particular doctrine, there is great consolation. People say to me, "Can a man be a Christian and not believe in this, that and the other thing?" It is very difficult to say what a man may not lack and yet be a Christian. When a man is in the perfected state, he will doubtless be "armed and equipped as the law directs;" but while he is on the way to it, and striving after it, it does not follow that he must be right ecclesiastically, dogmatically, or even practically, in any one of a hundred things. He may be as full of imperfections as a boy that is beginning to write is full of bad spelling and awkward letters. He may become a prince in literature, he may be even an editor, some day; and yet judging from what his beginnings are, you would say, "It is impossible for him to become anything?" All these imperfections are to be corrected. They will correct themselves. Bad writing corrects itself, and bad spelling corrects itself. Men get used to good spelling. They never learn it, exactly. It is an art, rather than an attainment. And so it is in respect to spiritual things. I do not care what point you start from—whether from the naturalism of Persia, or from the starting-point of truth and lies among the Brahmin, or from among the naturalists of scientific times, or from the outer circle of the Christian sects—from among those that are remotely orthodox, or almost orthodox, or quite orthodox, or more than orthodox, or super-hyper-orthodox; no matter where you start, the fact is just this: You have human nature in you; and that human nature has the seeds of this grand Christian development. And you may start where you will, so that you *start*, so that you put yourself under the drill of the divine spirit of love and peace and joy in the Holy Ghost, and so that you work having that ultimate object in view, with all your heart and mind and soul and strength. These other things are not without their validity and value and effects; but there are none of them that are vital. So far as they are not hindrances,

but helps, they come through this power of God which is unfolding us, and bringing us to that perfect manhood which God thought of when he made man, and which is the typical idea in his creation.

We see, secondly, the popular fallacy in respect to Christians and Christian life. Men suppose that when we are born again by the Spirit of God, we are brought into a perfected state—a state so much more eminent than that out of which we came, that it may be called a *miraculous translation;* and that instead of looking for sin and weakness and imperfection in himself, the Christian ought never to do anything wrong. A Christian is one, certainly, that sets out heartily to do what is right, and means to persevere in doing what is right; but I pray you, if I start from here to go across the continent by the northern route to California or the Columbia river, am I not a pilgrim, a traveler, bound to see the Pacific ocean, though I do not travel in a direct course? Does it follow that I shall take a short cut? Does it follow that I shall go forward every day? Does it follow that I may not sometimes sicken by the way, and wait for weeks? Does it follow that I may not mistake my path and take circuitous courses? Does it follow that I shall not be beguiled into a hunting or botanizing expedition? Does it follow that I shall not be charmed with some settlement, and persuaded to remain there for months? All these things may take place, and yet I may not give up my purpose of crossing the continent and seeing the Pacific shore. I may have all these aberrations and delays, and yet they may not change the grand fact that I am on my way to yonder distant coast.

A child means to be educated; and that purpose is not to be invalidated by the fact that his mother keeps him at home very often to do house-work, or that she permits him to go a visiting or playing, or that he plays truant (for some children—not good children, not nice Sunday-school-book children, of course, but some children—do play truant), and forgets his books, and looks after flies, and butterflies, and what not, and is full of whims and caprices; full of spirit to-day, and all deliquescence to-morrow; full of all manner of infirmities. He is a scholar, and is getting his education, notwithstanding all these hindrances.

And so a Christian is Christ's scholar, and is in Christ's school, and his heart is set on education, and his purpose is to learn; but oh! with what lingerings! with what accidents! with what diversions to the right and to the left! And yet, taking it year by year, his eye is on the one object which he has set out to attain, and he means that more than anything else, and is following on after it.

Suppose a person says to me, "Is X. C. a member of your church?" and I, having a great opinion of him, joyfully say, "Yes sir—yes."

"Well, I thought so. He cheated me yesterday." And my reply, naturally, to him, is, "Only once?" I would be glad to compromise at that. When I put the spiritual law of God on the interpretation of a man's thoughts, what is murder? How many murders there are committed by good men! When I judge a man by the law, "Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself," how much crime there is that goes on under forms of law! How much there is of selfishness that goes on under the name of benevolence! How little there is of essentially disinterested love, even in good men!

But do you expect that men who are going to school will never make the blunders which belong to education? This world is God's school-house, and I am trying, as his teacher, to set before you prescribed courses which you ought to follow; and you are mainly seeking to follow them; but not without blunderings and stumblings. You are not saints, nor anywhere near saints. Nobody is a saint till he is dead; and it is not safe to call anybody one till then. In this life—especially while in the midst of its struggles and strifes—how few men there are who can draw a straight line to the ideal, and then keep on that line?

"We have not a high-priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but one who was in all points tempted like as we are, yet without sin."

Men are like the vessels in a fleet that seek, with currents and winds, to make a given point or rendezvous. Some move forward in a direct line, some are driven far in one direction, and some are driven far in another; but at last they all cast anchor in the one harbor. And so, while sailing across the sea of life, some men keep their course, some are drifted in one way, and some are drifted in another way; but we trust that they will all make the harbor at last, and cast anchor, and be saved.

Nor are men to be supposed to be saved because they have put themselves in the right career ecclesiastically. Many persons blame men, as I have intimated, because they are so erratic and imperfect in their Christian lives. My reply is, that this is a matter which belongs to the human condition under which our great strife is taking place. But there are a great many others who say that when once a man is in the right church, and is properly ticketed and labeled, he is like an express package, that will either go through or else be settled for by the company. There is a great deal of anxiety as to which is the true church, and there is a world of investigation and study on that very point. If men would study half as much, and strive half as hard, to do the thing which the New Testament really requires—to love justice and mercy; to fear God and serve him; to follow on and know the Lord in the way of love, and peace, and purity of mind; if men would

spend their time in doing that half as long or half as actively as they labor in ascertaining about the apostolicity of the Church, the canonicity of rules and regulations, the orthodoxy of creeds, and the whole complicated, ponderous machinery of ecclesiastical school-houses, there would be more saints and more nascent saints than there are now. The fact is, that ministers make themselves ecclesiastical engineers, and are so busy running the machinery of the church that they have no leisure left for anything else. And there are a great many laymen, who are so busy studying the enginery by which the church operates, that they take no comfort of the voyage. They are mere engineer's pupils.

I do not undertake to say that churches are of no use. They are of a great deal of use. They are means of conveyance to heaven. They are instruments of education. But they are not divine, in any other sense than that in which things that are man-made are divine. Not a church on earth—not the Greek Church, nor the Roman Church, nor any one of the Protestant Churches—is any more divine than civil governments are. God has not anywhere written down what he wants, and called it *republicanism*, or *monarchy*, or *aristocracy*. He made men so that they must live together in society; and that necessity involves the growing out of it of some sort of government. And we have at last come to a knowledge of the fact that what the form of that government shall be is a matter of experiment. And we scoff at the idea of a *jure divino* government. Whether it be a government with a crown or a ballot-box, we say that it is a human device just as much as husbandry is, and just as much as the mechanic arts are, which have their foundation and necessity in nature, and are unfolded by the ordinary processes of investigation and thought. And so it is with the church, and all the ordinances of the church. There is not an ordinance that a man may not neglect, and yet go to heaven; and there is not an ordinance that a man may not observe, and yet, in spite of it, fail to get to heaven. A man may be a Catholic, and kiss the Pope's toe from the day of his birth to the day of his death, and not go to heaven. A man may be a Friend Quaker, and eschew all external forms and ceremonies, and yet be a good Christian, and get to heaven. Our salvation does not stand in the kind of school-house that we are in.

I went to a school (heaven help the mark!) in a little brown school-house, that smelled of wasps and boys, and I sat there through the weary day, and did not learn much; but there were other scholars that did. That school-house was nothing to me; but shall I take my individual experience and rail at the common-school which some profited by, though I did not?

All churches are good churches to those to whom they are good, and all churches are poor churches to those to whom they are poor. Turn your ox into a clover-field, and will it not get food? Turn your canary-bird into the same clover-field, and will he get food? Different kinds of creatures require different kinds of feeding. There is truth in the saying that "what is one man's food is another man's poison." Emotive and poetic natures require one sort of organization. Orderly and methodical natures require another sort of organization. Some men that are freer and wilder than others, will not take on a restraining organization. Let every man have that liberty which belongs to him. Only, here is the ideal of Christian development; and whether you get it in the church, or over the church, or under the church, or out of the church, get it. If the church can help you, take it; and if it cannot help you, do not take it. And do not sit down and grumble, but find some other way. If the church is the best aid, take that, not because it is perfect, but because it is better than anything else; but if there is anything better than the church, take that. Avail yourself of whatever will best promote the development of your soul into love and peace and power through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Men who are seeking this ideal development of Christian character by morality, by general good works, by a daily faithful use of the knowledge which they have, may be Christians, although they are not the highest style of Christians. They may be Christians, although they come far short of this ideal Christian character which is laid down as the mark and as the criterian in the New Testament. Men are not so much to distress themselves about whether they are Christians or not, as simply to ask themselves, "At what point in the progress am I? How far have I got along?" The New Testament recognizes the fact that there is a wide diversity in the phenomena of individual Christian life. The apostle declared that all were not able to receive the truth. And Christ said to his disciples, "I have many things to tell you, but you are not able to receive them." I perceive many doctrines which are called orthodox, and which in a measure or in a manner are rejected of men whom I believe to be Christians. The nature of these men's minds is such that they are not able to receive those doctrines. The mode of statement is not yet sufficiently generic to take in all forms of truth. The same truth can take on a multitude of different forms.

Take any one great truth; as, for instance, the truth of the natural character of man, as low and sinful. The commanding fact is this: that every living being on earth is sinful to such a degree that he needs the regenerating power of the Holy Ghost; that he needs the divine touch and stimulating influence from the beginning to the end of his

life, to bring him up to true manhood. No man reaches his final disclosure by any power that is in himself, or any power that is in the natural world, or any power of education, or the power of any social influence of society. Every man must come to his true and higher manhood by the power of God in the soul. And every man is depraved to the degree in which he needs that power.

Men may receive in one age one philosophy, or one exposition of the truth, in another age another exposition of truth, and in another another; but the essential point of unity is there, though the man may be so rude or cynical that the regenerating power of the spirit of God never can come to his true nature. And men may vary endlessly and infinitely in their exposition of the truth, or in their power of accepting this or that way of presenting the truth, and yet be Christians. And so I think that many persons in churches who are called heretical are Christians. Though they cannot accept doctrinal statements of Christian truth, they do in the main accept that grand ideal of which Christ was the only embodiment, and which he more perfectly presents than it was ever presented before. And they are following after Christ. And it is doing that which constitutes them Christians—not Christians on the best model, it may be; but Christians that are on their way toward perfection. They are of those of whom the apostle says, "They shall be saved so as by fire." Nevertheless, they are in the train, and are on the road, and by the grace of God shall yet see eternal life.

The Christian attainment in this life will vary in one and another. Some seem to grow but little, and some seem to grow very much. There are infinite degrees of variation in the actual attainments of men in this world, partly from the forces which they inherit, partly from the education which they receive, and partly from circumstances which help one and hinder another. A hundred things there are which vary the successful application of man's purposes to the great end of spiritual life. But every man that knows in his own soul that the thing which he wants and is aiming at and seeking is a perfect manhood in Christ Jesus—him I call a Christian—a follower of Christ.

We must, therefore, make our definitions larger and more charitable. We must make our terms of admission to Christian communion larger and more charitable. We must, above all things, explode, first or last, the idea that man-made institutions can be so constructed, justly and rightfully, in the sight of God, as to exclude those whom Christ himself personally receives, and whose life gives evidence of the indwelling of the Holy Ghost. No church on earth can stand when God looks upon it and sees that there are many that are not permitted to come into it, not because they are not followers of Christ, but because they do not know how to accept the interpretations and con-

structions which some men put upon the great problems of divine truth.

A man need not, therefore, despair because he is not orthodox. A man need not despair because he is not a Christian as he sees that other people are Christians. I would preach a catholicity as broad as the heart of my Master. I hold up this great conception of divine life in the soul—this fact that, by the power of God, it is possible for us to have a spiritual life that shall lift us easily into the precinct and presence and communion of God; so that the influence which comes upon our soul, from day to day, reflected from the sky, reflected from the earth, reflected from living things, reflected from business and society, shall still be the influence of the divine power.

I believe that under that soul-guidance and inspiration, if we will only yield to it and be led by it, there is, connected with this royalty of love-life with God the profoundest harmony and peace in our own selves. The torment of the battle between the upper and the lower life in man ceases or may cease. Of all battles, there are none like the unrecorded battles of the soul. Without banners spread or trumpets sounded, with no visible conflict and clash of arms, God and angels know that the fiercest battles and bitterest strifes of the universe are those which are waged in the secret places of men's souls, where the earthly, sensual and beastly elements of human nature are in conflict with that which is pure and sweet and spiritual in them. These are the battles that God registers, which are going on in men, and which, blessed be God, issue, or may issue, in the "peace which passeth all understanding," in that land where love, and conscience, and faith and hope appear, chanting the song of victory, and wearing upon their heads the laurel wreath, and where selfishness and pride and passion are humbled to become the servants of the soul, and no longer to be its despots and masters.

"It doth not yet appear what we shall be." You and I probably shall not reach this attainment in the present life. But there are some, I think, who come very near to it. When I read the lives of saints in the old Roman church; when I read the life of Eugénie de Guérin; when I read of the Madam Guyons; when I read of one and another in the Protestant Saints' Calendar, that seem to have lifted themselves up, or to have been lifted up, above the perturbations of this lower atmosphere, and to have lived in perpetual joy, I do not feel inclined to doubt that there are some who do reach that state. I am disposed to think that it is not simply a final condition into which we are to come at last, but that it is a normal condition, and one into which we may come, and in which we may abide, in this life. So that when I see in a soul great goodness, and great benignity, and great peace, and great joy, and a state of forelooking toward its heritage, I do not say within

myself, "This is something unnatural." I do not say, "His appetites and passions have burned out and left only his higher manhood." I do not say, "This is the quiet of autumnal decadence in him." No, that is the direction of true human growth, toward joy, and peace and power.

I go further, and say that I do not doubt that there was revealed in the apostles a miraculous power. Nor do I doubt that there have been ages since the time of the apostles in which there have been here and there single natures that were ordained nobly, and, by education, or in the divine providence, brought into such conditions that they reached the altitudes of this higher disclosure, and had power such as does not belong to ordinary mortals. I do not doubt that there may be some persons who are able to break through into that power yet. And I believe the time may come in which the race will have reached that stage of development in which it will be found that there is power in the soul of a man to use natural laws in ways that are now misunderstood, and that we call miraculous. I believe that this is among the ultimate disclosures of Christianity in the individual soul.

But it is not for you nor for me, probably. I am one of the lingerers. I reach so far up that I can begin to see what they are doing above me. You reach in the same direction. And yet, though I have some faint conception of the reality of that state, it doth not yet appear to me what I shall be. But I know that when he shall appear I shall be like him. For I shall see him as he is. This I know: that my life is hid, now, with Christ in God; and that when he shall appear, I shall also appear with him. I shall never know myself, I shall never make my true appearance, until I stand enfranchised and rejoice in the glory of God in the other world. Then I shall reach all that I have dreamed of, and aspired to, and striven after, and fought for—and not till then.

Between this and that, battle, night and day, turbulent elements, unbalanced forces; but then, my own better self, my educated self, all that in me which is unfolded and brought into symmetry—the qualities which have been developed under the training of the schoolmaster Jesus, who has shone out upon me and made me what I am—these are tending to draw me upward and onward toward my heavenly home.

In Jesus, the First and the Last; the Alpha and Omega; the soul's Nurse; the soul's Mother; the soul's Saviour; the Providence and the Grace; the all in this world that we can know of God—in him the Father dwells, and he in the Father; so that they who have seen Jesus have seen the Father also. Him I shall see in the magnitude and in the glory of the then revealed beauty of the Godhead. And I shall be like him, as the miniature is like the full size; and I shall be satisfied.

When the tide has been coming in, I have often seen how it chafed and fretted, running into some narrow-mouthed bay, filling it, swirling round, and lapping up on the shores, till by-and-by, still flowing, and flowing, and flowing, it filled the bay full,—the tide had spent itself, there ran a smoothing ripple all over the surface, and the whole bay at last was at rest. And so the soul, while yet it is being filled, is disturbed by ripples and eddies; but by-and-by, when it shall have been filled full of the power and presence of God, it will be satisfied, and will be perfectly at peace, and will be full of joy; and singing forever and forever shall be its sweet employment in heaven. Sorrow and sighing shall flee away, and the old dark, mourning world we shall remember as children in manhood remember the moment's shower of their youth that broke up their pleasure-party. All the sufferings that we have experienced while getting our education, will, when we shall once have come to our perfect manhood in Christ Jesus, seem to us only as dreams. And the price that we shall have paid will seem as nothing, and less than nothing, in comparison with the exceeding glory of that which eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, nor the heart of man conceived.

Go on, dear brethren. Many of you are nearer home than you think. A step more, and you shall rest. Many of you, though far away yet, are under a safe convoy. Press forward. Let nothing discourage you. Though your attainments may be small, and though your sins may be many, remember that you are Christ's, not because you are good, but because you are to be developed into goodness by him. Trust him; follow him; that by-and-by you may live with him.

PRAYER BEFORE THE SERMON.

We acknowledge thee, our Father and our Saviour, as the source of life. We draw from thee both light and knowledge and comfort. All sustenance of the soul is of thee. And that which we seem to borrow of one another is but reflected light. We rejoice that thou, the Supreme and the all-filling, art all-satisfying. There is no want that is in us which thou canst not supply. We rejoice that thou hast made us, even in this life, so rich, so strong, lifting us up above all the animal race, and giving to us degrees of power eminent above all these other influences underneath authority. And we rejoice that we have not reached nor attained to the end of being; that above us are ranks and degrees infinite; yea, and that we, too, are rising to take hold of higher attainments; and that, in nobler circumstances, and in perfected being, we are to be sons of God. What that is does not yet appear. We know that it is glorious. We know that it shall fill us with satisfaction. In the midst of toils, under burdens, with darkness hanging about our path, we look, though we know not their full meaning, to these precious promises which make the future so bright, which destroy the fear of dying, and which take sadness away from decay and decline in years. We believe that we were old when we were born, as they that are farthest from their true life; and that we are growing young as we grow old, as those that draw near to themselves indeed. For then alone shall we be what we are to be, when we shall have reached thy presence in the heavenly land.

And now we rejoice that years are bringing, with the waste of worldly things, the creation, the revelation, and the full joy and foretaste of those better possessions, those noble experiences, from reformed, and purified, and exalted faculties, which thou shalt give to all that are with thee in the heavenly land. Fill us with this sacred thought, and the intimations of our coming state, so that we may, even in this world, learn, under burdens and under discouragements, yet to be cheerful, yet to maintain our faith and our hold upon duty, and not to count meanly of ourselves, nor throw away our chances of immortality. And grant, we pray thee, that all those who are in twilight seeking dimly to live aright, may have a clearer understanding of the divine plan in human life.

We pray that all those who are waging battle against their own passions and easily besetting sins may have thy presence, and the inspiration of thy Spirit; that they may never lay down their arms till they are victorious over every thought and feeling, and have brought every one into subjection to the Lord Jesus Christ. We pray that thou wilt make us hate selfishness in all its forms. Grant that more and more we may see what beauty there is in kindness and love, both toward God and toward men. And may that be the kingdom where we shall desire to reign, and in which we shall strive to attain degrees of excellence and of honor. And, while other men rage and contest for the things which perish in the using, may we seek to lay up treasure in heaven, where moth and rust do not corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal. We pray that thou wilt look upon all those that hunger and thirst after righteousness, to whom thou hast made the gracious promise that they shall be filled. Grant that they may have soul-satisfaction, perfect rest, in thee. Thou hast promised peace, not as the world gives, but divine and celestial peace. Grant that there may be many to whom this promise shall be fulfilled. Great peace may they have that love thy law, and that love thee and thy cause. And we pray that thou wilt fill thy people with holy zeal, not alone for themselves, but for the upbuilding of thine outward kingdom in this world. May the number of those that live by faith be multiplied. May the number of those whose power is in love be increased. May all who love thee sincerely learn to love one another. And we pray that there may grow up this heart-unity by which,

little by little, outward dissensions shall be absorbed, and things needful shall be made harmless.

We pray, O Lord, that thou wilt bless thy cause under every form. May justice prevail. May truth assert its right. May men yield allegiance to thee under all forms of goodness. May they see the God that incarnates himself in the ways of men, and follow after every step of rectitude, and righteousness, and purity and gentleness, and mercy and love.

And we pray that thou wilt be near to all that are in trouble, and succor them, or teach them the mystery of suffering, and all its benefit. Grant that any who are sorrowing under bereavements, while they acknowledge thine hand reverently, may partake somewhat of the joy that yet shall be revealed in them when suffering shall have had its perfect work. And be near to give light to any that are in darkness and perplexity; to any that are in doubts and fears at every step; to any that are under the bondage of conscience. May their tyrant relax his hold, and give them that peace which love brings, and conscience cannot.

And we pray thee, O Lord, our God! that thou wilt draw near to all that are in poverty, and are struggling therewith. May they have the power given them by which they shall see above the visible and the present, and live more and more in the glories of thy coming deliverance.

We beseech of thee that all classes and conditions of men may come up before thee, and may receive thy divine benediction.

Bless the churches that are gathered together in these great cities, and all thy servants that to-day shall preach the Gospel. And may they be able to preach with power from on high. And may they see the word prospering in their hands, and the cause of God growing.

We pray that wars may cease, and that the occasions of war may perish. And we beseech of thee that ignorance may flee away, and superstition therewith; and that all the earth may see the salvation of our God.

We ask these things for Jesus Christ's sake. *Amen.*

PRAYER AFTER THE SERMON.

Our Heavenly Father, we beseech of thee that thou wilt grant the light of consolation, and joy, and comfort, to all those thy followers that are seeking, through the twilight and through the darkness, to find thee. How great is that darkness to some! How many are there that say, "All thy waves have gone over me. All my passions sweep headlong, terrific, uncontrolled and uncontrollable. My God! my God! dost thou care for me?" Thou dost care for the poor and struggling soul. Thou dost understand how hard the conflict is with those that are under the dominion of passion; that have been perverted by bad education; that are biased and drawn away by sympathies of evil people round about them; that are, by sickness and poverty, and ten thousand grating influences of life, made wretched. Thou art sorry for them; and though sin is in them, and thou canst not bear that they should be sinners, yet thou dost love them; and thou art waiting for them; and thou art patient; and thou art sending them sweet angelic influences; and if they will, thou wilt bring them out of bondage, and thou wilt carry them through the desert, and they shall even see the promised land. Great is the power of thy grace over against our weakness and want.

We beseech of thee, if there are those in thy presence who desire to live aright, but stand still thinking that they will wait till they know better what to do, that they may hear thy voice saying to them, If any man will do my will, he shall know of the doctrine which I preach.

Grant, O Lord, that every one may be active in the cause of God, casting off evil, reaching out to perfect communion with thee, to the joy of a controlling love, and to that peace which passeth all understanding.

Grant that every one may live, not for time, not for money, not for pleasure, not for ambition, not even for friendship, but for self in God. And may every one see in God the grand aim of his life, and feel the drawing of thine heart. May we be everlastingly homesick till we get home. And we beseech of thee that we may be near to those who hunger and thirst after righteousness, and who are seeking every day to fulfill thy will, and yet are conscious that they walk in shaded places, and for whose feet there are no mountain tops, nor land of Beulah, nor out-look of blissful foresight. Grant that still they may labor in the appointed places, and according to the divine will, and wait for the revelation of Jesus Christ in them in the world to come.

It is not long. They are seeds yet, but are soon to sprout and grow, and shall grow in a fairer clime and a better soil. And grant, we pray thee, that those who stand very near to thee may listen if peradventure they yet may bear the harp and the sound of the heavenly band.

Oh! how many are there there whom we would hear again! Our arms reach out that have been emptied. Our hearts long to feel again the head that once covered it. We wait for those that are dear to us as our life. They are gone, and the places that knew them shall know them no more forever. Blessed spirits! we are coming to thee, and are not far away. Come to the battlement, and cry out to us. Come, come that the Spirit and the Bride in your voices may invite us thither. Lord Jesus we are coming to thee; poor, spent, discouraged, sinful, to be born again, and again, and again, until we may grow up into thee in all things. Do not despise us. Be very gentle to us. Put thine arms about us, that we may be carried in the bosom of thy love into our Father's kingdom. And there will we praise the Father, the Son, and the Spirit, forever more. *Amen.*

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